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ABSTRACT

The Educational Reform Act (ERA) of 1988 reflects the most comprehensive restructuring of education in Britain in this century. This paper discusses the implementation of the National curriculum, the innovation at the heart of the ERA. The first part of the paper offers the views of educational commentators on changes resulting from this law. Commentators believe that: (1) the ERA serves the goal of reducing the power of local government in favor of increased central control; (2) the National Curriculum was designed without the benefit of professional educational expertise; and (3) the ERA has altered the roles of teachers and head teachers. The second part of the paper discusses the views of teachers from four schools in different parts of England on the effect of the new policies on schools and teachers' professional lives. One theme raised by teachers concerns the school-level response to the National Curriculum. Some positive advantages of communication and solidarity among staff are seen. A second theme concerns changes in classroom teaching. Teachers feel that curriculum integration is threatened. Teachers are also concerned about the effect of the National Curriculum on class size, scheduling, planning, and standard assessment. A third theme concerns increased professional demands on teachers. A reference list of 18 items is provided. (BC)

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THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM OF ENGLAND AND WALES:

ITS IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD CLASSROOMS

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The National Curriculum of England and Wales: Its Implementation and Evaluation in Early Childhood Classrooms

The Educational Reform Act (ERA) 1988 in England and Wales reflects the most comprehensive restructuring of education in Britain this century; "almost all the taken-for-granteds in the system are being shaken up at once" as Pollard (1990) puts it. This paper offers a discussion of the implementation of the National Curriculum, the innovation at the heart of the ERA. The first part of the paper offers the views of several recent educational commentators on the changes taking place, reflecting the depth of professional concern felt in response to the reforms. The second part of the paper presents a discussion of issues explored in interviews with teachers in different parts of England on the effect of the new policies on the schools in which they work and on their own professional lives.

The professional challenge of the National Curriculum

For the Conservative Party in power in Britain during the past decade the ERA has served two main political goals. First, it is one part of the more general political intention to reduce the power of local government in favour of increased central control. The ERA is an "attack on local government and its control, through democratic procedures of local school systems" (Simon, 1990). Local authority powers in areas other than education, are also being effectively curtailed.

Second, the ERA serves the political intention to reduce the power and influence of the professions in British life. Again, education is only one of the professions suffering in this way; medicine and law are also affected. A.V. Kelly (1990) has provided an excellent critical review of the government's means of achieving this second goal in the field of

education. The National Curriculum has been designed mostly by political planners who have taken little account of professional expertise. As a result, nationwide school-based curriculum planning is being seriously encumbered because professional knowledge and understandings have not been incorporated in the documents setting out the central government's requirements of teachers (Jeavons, 1990, p 2).

It is important to recognise the wider political purposes of the educational reforms in Britain because the vulnerability of institutions within the state can threaten the practices and values of the individuals who work within them (Kemmis, 1987, p 80). There should be concern for the individuals, however, since "the best structures in the world will not work when human beings do not want them to work and quite poor structures work very well if the human beings concerned have common purposes, shared values and efficient working partnerships." (Sallis, 1990, p 26). The schools as institutions cannot easily defend the practices and values of those who teach in them where these positions conflict with the government view. If they did so they might put their own very existence at risk. This is especially problematic in times of radical reform where the changes in demand on individual classroom teachers involve significant shifts in the values currently inherent in their ways of working with children. And there are many teachers and headteachers who are opposed to what they are being required to do by the government. "The dilemma of accountability for teachers is that they have to accept responsibility for implementing policy for which they are not in fact accountable" (Silcock, 1990, p 7). Headteachers in the front line have responded carefully, while under considerable pressures themselves.

In Britain the life of a school owes a great deal to the personal and professional qualities of the headteacher, the British equivalent to the

North American 'principal.' "The Educational Reform Act has radically altered the statutory and professional context within which heads operate and changed their relationships with LEAs (Local Education Authorities), governors, parents, staff and children" Boydell (1990, p 20). Traditional reasons for aspiring to headship were "a desire based on proven ability as an expert teacher, to establish their own philosophy in their 'own' school" (Boydell, 1990, p 23). Now they are required to take more of a managerial role and attend to the financing of a wide range of the school's functioning which they had not previously been responsible for. The main complaint from the headteachers has been the time they have not been able to spend in classrooms with teachers and feelings of powerlessness under increasing pressure from a variety of sources outside the school itself.

Individual teachers who are faced with reforms which they do not agree with have to reflect critically on their professional positions and either leave the field of education into retirement or other employment, or submit uncritically to new directives in order to keep their current teaching post or endeavour to mediate between institutional direction and personal professional values. This mediation can be achieved if teachers distance themselves from the inconsistencies created by the changes. This distancing can be seen to occur in schools where the teacher continues to maintain current practices in the classroom while at the same time colluding with the headteachers whose role it is to mediate between the institution and the outside authorities. The collusion involves the teacher in agreeing to make changes without actually altering her practice in any very significant way and the headteacher accepting the teacher's assurance. Such collusion appears necessary so that the heads can defend their institution with confidence that they are carrying out the required reforms. They are after all the people who are responsible for the continued existance of the

institution in a competitive world in which schools are to be publicly compared with others on the basis of mandated standard assessment.

In this threatening climate headteachers themselves have been found to be playing down their role in implementing change and emphasizing their role in sustaining it. Many claim to be more concerned with the quality of relationships among staff, team work and job fulfilment. Monitoring or evaluating were not high on their agenda among current pressures (Boydell, 1990, p 22). Stephen Kemmis (1987) writes, "schools can no more change without the informed commitment of teachers than teachers can change without the informed commitment of the institutions in which they work; that schools and systems (local clusters of schools, or LEAs) are similarly interdependent and interactive in the process of reform." (p 74) Yet, the power does lie in the hearts, heads and hands of teachers to take active steps to be ready to resume authority when the new policies are shown to be unworkable. Such a response by teachers would help them should they be once again exposed (as they have been in recent years) to public blame for the failure of education to meet the needs of children and parents as well as those of the prevailing society. Openly questioning or challenging government directives in the current climate in Britain may be considered a subversive activity (Kemmis, 1987; Postman and Weingartner, 1969). However, as such, it can also be professional suicide for individual teachers.

Kelly (1990) writes of the professional responsibility teachers could undertake to limit the damage inevitable in the wake of the implementation of the new education policies. He has attempted to outline the nature of the inadequacies of the National Curriculum which was made with "little reference to professional educators or teachers and thus without the 'knowledge, skills and understanding' of those whose professional concern it has been to plan educational provision and to implement the plans so made"

(p 129). Brighouse offers a perspective which suggests that the current policies offer an opportunity to examine a range of educational practice in terms of what will and will not work so as to be ready for the inevitable 'collapse' of the education system as currently conceived. Some writers take comfort in those ERA reforms other than the implementation of the National Curriculum. These can be seen to offer opportunities for increased communication between parents, teachers and other members of the public about education, its aims and its professional practices (Sallis, p 31). In Sallis' view " the greatest danger of all is that because of negative attitudes on the part of teachers, and particularly headteachers, to some of the new structures, we shall miss the chance to find allies for the good fight" (p 26).

Implementation of the National Curriculum began in September 1989. The second part of this paper presents discussion of selected responses to this reform by teachers from four very different schools in different parts of England. The teachers' views represent their accommodation to the far-reaching implications of the new curriculum requirements. The voices of these teachers must be heard in the context of a wider tide of cultural change in Britain which has seriously affected educational provision. British primary education has for decades been internationally renowned for the "social democratic, egalitarian and child-centred ideas to which most teachers have subscribed" (Pollard, in Proctor, 1990, p. 74) The principles supporting the new legislation are very different. In 1974 Taylor et al. wrote about the curriculum evolving through the influences of a 'network of interactions and communications with other institutions, and with individuals outside the school, which connect the primary school to society - a pluralistic model which is grounded in a recognition of a considerable degree of teacher autonomy.'

Today, by contrast, teachers are dependent on a centrally dictated curriculum which is seen by many as "the gravely flawed product of amateurs, a hasty shallow, simplistic sketch of a curriculum, reductionist in one direction, marginalizing in another, paying only dismissive lip-service to the professional enterprise and initiative on which all progress depends" (O'Connor, 1987, as quoted in Kelly, 1990). "The legislation imposes a National Curriulum and a framework for its delivery both of which represent a serious curtailment of teacher autonomy" (Pollard, in Proctor, 1990, p.63) with the attendant dangers of teachers becoming "mere deskilled functionaries" (Pollard, ibid. p. 63). "To a great extent, the content of the curriculum which (teachers) teach will be prescribed and they will be required to monitor pupil achievement much more closely, precisely and publicly than in the past" (Pollard, ibid. p.73).

An interesting perspective for north American readers is given by Hatch (1990) in an article pointing out the opposite directions in which reform movements are going in the U.S. and the U.K. aptly entitled 'Exchanging places?' It appears that the emphasis in the U.K. is on removing power from the teachers and putting it in the hands of politicians, parents, or future employers so as to require the schools to respond to the social functions of education. In the U.S. by contrast there is talk of 'empowering teachers,' giving back some authority for educational decision-making to the teachers, to those who understand most about what children are like. This comparative perspective helps to explain the nature of the resistance to some of the requirements of the National Curriculum by many teachers.

The teachers' voices

The teachers quoted in this paper were interviewed in the Summer of 1990, at the end of the first academic year of the implementation of the National Curriculum. The interviews took place in the seventh year of a

longitudinal study of teachers' professional development. The teachers were all in their mid-twenties and in their third year of full-time employment. Two of the four had already worked in two schools in different parts of the country. They are all effective teachers of young children, each having shown considerable commitment to their chosen career over the past seven years.

Three main themes emerge from the teachers' discussion of the National Curriculum requirements and the effects of these on the teachers in their schools. The first theme concerns the response to the implementation of the National Curruculum at the school level. In discussing this issue there seems to be a substantial difference between the response of small compared to large schools. The schools have especially different approaches to the issue of subject specialization. The second theme addresses the changes teachers feel they have had to make in their classroom teaching in order to respond to the demands of the National Curriculum. Curriculum integration in project work and the cross-curricular study of topics seems threatened. There are implications for class size, scheduling, planning, assessment, and record keeping. and one of the major problems was the pressure of having to achieve more under difficult conditions than was possible in the time available. The third theme concerns the other professional demands being made on teachers in terms of in-service training, professional development, and communication with other teachers both within each school and between schools in a local area. The effect of the National Curriculum policies on the teachers' perception of their career development and opportunities for advancement within the profession was also explored. There was concern with status and promotion prospects, with professional commitment and responsibilities to be assumed. Each of these three themes will be discussed in turn.

The school response to the National Curriculum.

The four schools referred to in this paper showed a range of responses to the new legislation at the school level. One was a very small rural primary school with fewer than 70 children on roll. Two were large urban schools. One of these was an infant school with about 270 students and the other a primary school with about 400 students. The primary school was in a catchment area with a very high proportion of children of Asian origin. The fourth school was a primary school for some 180 children on a public housing estate in a small rural town.

Some positive advantages of the National Curriculum were seen in terms of communication and solidarity among staff in the school. As one teacher put this "One emphasis of the school is that we are all going to learn together. No one is actually seen as the absolute expert and if you do not have a subject specialisation then you are seen as a good generalist all round teacher, therefore you're going to teach anything well."

Another of the teachers had felt very isolated during her first year of teaching two years earlier. For her the National Curriculum had opened new opportunities for her to talk with her fellow teachers, to learn from them as well as share some of her expertise in a way that she had found impossible before. "I think the best thing is that the infant staff are getting together to plan and talk about what they're doing. We started to get together because we were studying the same theme of 'water' and there's a lot of 'well, I tried this...' and 'have a go at this!' There's a lot of cooperation that wasn't there before."

In the small rural school the communication among teachers required by the new curriculum involved meeting with groups of teachers from other schools. "We've all been trying to work in our little groups on how to keep

these assessments, the best way to keep records." One of the main problems for the small schools, however, was access to subject specialist expertise. Some teachers were being asked to become experts in several areas and to share the knowledge they were acquiring through in-service courses. One young teacher was supposed to take responsibility for early childhood education (5-7 year olds), integrating the preschool (children and parents) one afternoon a week, language, drama, and art as well as deputise for the headteacher as he was increasingly required to be out of the school building. So much responsibility, even though the school was a small one was proving quite stressful for this teacher.

At the school level the teachers were welcoming the collegiality brought about by the requirements to have a common understanding of planning and assessment. Some headteachers were managing to delegate more responsiblity than they had previously and in so doing had expressed faith in the ability of their staff. However, there were signs that the collaboration was being done under too much pressure and with inadequate direction leading to a feeling among school staffs that some very difficult times lay ahead.

There was agreement that the National Curriculum had far-reaching consequences at the school level. Some of the communication had more defensive undertones: "I think it's had a big effect on our school. Last year when I came here the school was writing policies, pre-National Curriculum things, what we believe in, what we feel is good for governors and parents. I think we weren't sure what the National Curriculum was going to contain. We wanted a statement so we were not forced into doing things that we haven't agreed on. Compared with my last school, they're very keyed up, they knew what was going on and they were getting prepared for it." This teacher felt pleased to have made the move from the other school which she felt was not in touch with imminent changes, "I know if I'd stayed at

that school I would still be thinking 'Oh no! What's the National Curriculum?' I'm sure I would, I can't imagine them having the sort of motivation to get on and do anything about it."

Changes in classroom teaching

The second theme emerging from discussion with the teachers concerned the changes that seemed to be required of them in their day-to-day classroom teaching. Generally the most immediate response was that the National Curriculum was going to make little difference to the way they taught. One teacher spoke about her belief that she had been well trained in preparation for teaching and that she was well able to implement her daily plans, "It's not changed how I work with the children in any way. I mean, I do my records and my little tick sheets at the end of the term, then I don't look at them again till the end of the next term when I fill in a few more boxes. It is doesn't influence me at all. No, I can't see any point. Whereas when I'm teaching I'm always noticing; I store my knowledge about the fact that, say, Jonathon's nearly there, I mean he just needs a little extra help right now to understand something." However, she did say that her planning had been affected in that she would check the National Curriculum for content, "I did electricity, batteries and magnets and things last term because it fitted in with my topic anyway. Perhaps I wouldn't have done that if it hadn't been for the National Curriculum."

All the teachers either asserted or hoped that they were going to try not to relate any differently to the children as they were teaching them. However, they expected to be required to plan, assess children and record progress in new ways. Planning was clearly to be much more publicly shared among teachers within the school. However, there was some concern that the children's learning might suffer because it would be more difficult to

follow the children's interests or take advantage of the 'teachable moments' arising for individual children. There was a fear that there would be more pressure on classroom time to accomplish prespecified planning objectives leading to more whole class teaching and less curriculum integration in the form of project work. As one teacher put it' "It's going to make more demands on you when you're planning your activities. You are going to have to keep thinking, 'I haven't done this or that, so I'll have to get it in,' instead of letting a project run and following the children's lead a bit then bringing them back to some main concepts through their interests."

Another teacher described a science lesson based on the National Curriculum program of studies in which she was teaching the concept of 'water-proof' through trying out different materials to find which one might most effectively cover an umbrella. During the course of the lesson she discovered that several of the children (aged 5-6) were much more interested in absorption, which materials absorbed the most water from the bowl, how different fabrics felt and reacted when squeezed. They appeared to have little practical experience of that concept. This involved her in a change of plan so that she could provide the children with a variety of activities leading to a more tactile appreciation of absorption. This teacher was afraid that having to cover a set range of required topics would make such changes of plan more difficult to justify. However, there has been appreciation of the science curriculum content offering suggestions of specific concepts to explore which might otherwise not have been approached by some teachers.

There was concern expressed over the need for subject specialists to come into the classroom to teach. In one teacher's case the headteacher came into her multi-age class to teach history while she went to teach art to another class. She was afraid that in the interests of giving some

history to her class there would be less time for the integration of history with geography and local studies. Blyth and Bish (1990) suggest that "Each school should have a coordinator for history with a special allowance to attend in-service courses, plan the work in her school, and help her colleagues to teach history well." These authors do however, go on to say "This has serious implications for small schools, and would probably require the grouping of such schools to share expertise and resources." (p 17)

Another concern was that class size would rise. I spent three days observing this summer in a classroom with one teacher and 39 five and six year olds. This teacher was very concerned that she could not teach so well as she had previously, with so many children and no ancillary help. There are predictions of an increasing shortage of teachers and large numbers of teachers leaving the profession. Yet the teachers I interviewed were as concerned as ever to get to know the children well as individuals so as to teach effectively. Where there were still fewer than 25 children in the class there were still many examples of the individualization frequently observed in good British early childhood classrooms.

One teacher with a small class described her teaching in this way, "You need to be moving about the classroom noticing what's going on with each child because you know the children and you know their progression. Jonathon's just gone through this stage when he's doing his own emergent writing. He just did lots of lovely rows of little letters and then one day he just grouped them and that was a step forward because each group was a word. Next day he went back to doing lines of letters so I stopped with him and we looked at a book and off he went! He was just half way there. Like Jenny working today. What is exceptional for one child is not for another. If Susie did a piece of writing or a story that might just be a beautiful picture and some scribble. Genna does lots of lovely circles and writes

'G's everywhere and I praise her for that but Hayley I expect much more from, and I get it. So you're making judgements all the time for each individual child." However, it is likely that there will be increasing pressure on teachers to adopt a more collectivist rather than individualist approach to their teaching. "The National Curriculum imposes a standardized structure on all classrooms which invites standard, not differentiated methodologies" (Silcock, 1990).

One of the reforms arousing the most suspicion and apprehension in the minds of teachers is that of standard assessment. All the schools were discussing how best to assess progress in each of the subjects and devising ways to record assessments efficiently and in detail. There is still some considerable confusion about how this can be done. One of the problems concerns the optimum generality or specificity of records of progress. As one teacher put it, "We've got these sheets that are quite general, and we've got others that we are trying out that are too detailed. You think, for instance, whether they know the difference between 'on top' and 'underneath' - I think they do but I haven't actually tested them. But it's the sort of thing you'd notice when you asked a child to pick up something, 'oh look there's a pencil under there' and they pick it up because they look under the table. So am I supposed to sit there then with my little notebook to ask each child if he understands 'underneath' then 'next to' and so on?"

One of the problems noted in the Government DES report by Her Majesty's Inspectors on the Implementation of the National Curriculum in Primary Schools (1989) was that there was "a lack of clarity and helpfulness in the information from local and central government" which was hindering the implementation of the National Curriculum and in the case of assessment and recording there was an actual "lack of information." As the information flow increased in the area of assessment, it proved in some cases to be

quite unworkable. As Silcock writes (1990) about schools in one Local Education Authority, "There is considerable in-school discussion about National Curriculum monitoring producing a diversity of models - each it seems, flawed fatally by the time they take to use" (p 6).

One of the problems here is that there is confusion over the relative importance of effecting and recognising real progress in skill and understanding on the one hand and the need for curriculum delivery in the form of 'coverage' on the other. Two examples are of particular interest here. Silcock (1990) reports one teacher's pedagogical dilemma as follows, "..although she could cover the ground adequately she could not guarantee that children would actually learn anything." Referring to an action research project she had carried out she described how she and a colleague had begun each day by trying to discover what the children (aged 5-6) remembered from the day before. They found that very little was remembered. She said, "How many times do we have to teach anything before we can be sure children know or can do it? How much time do we have?" She was afraid that teachers whould be checking children on lists as having learned something whether it was true or not. Then teachers would be recording according to what they knew about the children, as they always have previously, rather than according to their direct observation of the children. When the teacher just 'knows' maybe we should trust that this knowledge is built on the cumulation of evidence about the child's understanding gained through daily teaching conversations over a long period of time. Silcock (1990) makes the point that "coming to understand something" is not like "becoming ill with recognizable symptoms" but is more like "a transforming experience which affects many behaviours often manifested over a long rather than a short term."

An example of such long term learning in young children is given in the

Early Childhood Curriculum Group's report (1989), Early childhood education: The early years curriculum and the National Curriculum. There is a description of how children's understanding of plant growth might develop during the course of one academic year through the very common kinds of experience the children have of growing things in the classroom. The description also offers some indication of how different levels of understanding in different children might be developed in different ways through the same classroom experiences, "It is typical of young children that experience is built up over weeks and months, interest is generated and sustained through interaction with the teacher, and knowledge is acquired, sometimes in small increments, and at other times through considerable leaps of understanding as it is relevant to their experience."

The second example is given by Smith (1990) describing the teaching of subtraction. The match between past experience, current understanding and new information is important for learning. Yet this match is different for individual children. Therefore the teacher instructing a whole class or even a group may need to attend to misunderstanding on an individual basis. The example Smith describes is of a young child who does not understand the meaning of the words 'how much more' in the context of a question about 'difference'. He describes the process of trying to learn how close the child is to understanding the concept and trying to seek out exactly that point at which connections are not being made. He makes the point that learning is not a simple 'either you know it or you don't' kind of matter.

Smith describes the "territory teachers are working in constantly, mediating between what the children can bring and trying to get them to extend themselves into the half-known." He refers to the mind as, "'what she knows' bordered very hazily by a grey area of what she's working on, her work-in-progress, what she can do with a bit of help." He then makes the

point that "summative assessment is nothing more than bureaucratic and reductive convenience." The formative part of the assessment process is that which the teacher makes as part of her teaching of each child every day "on a moment-by-moment scale"; it is based on evidence which is fluid, uncertain, repetitious, now here, now gone again. "...learning is a messy rather than a neat process and the consequence of this can often be the realization that too much of what we do amounts to the mere laying down of a superficial veneer of 'ability' which is all too rarely transferable." (Smith, 1990, p 12) I am reminded of the analogical situation in which news media reporters are called upon to search out the truth as accurately and quickly as possible in a war zone. They find themselves doing such ridiculous things as asking soldiers or airmen just back from a mission to report on numbers of enemy planes seen or numbers of POWs captured. They find that the individual was too close to the interaction to have reliable information on the required scale for meaningful reporting.

What precisely is the National Curriculum requiring in the way of assessment? For each of the nine subjects to be taught in the primary school there are a number of 'attainment targets' (ATs) specified. For each of these ATs there are ten levels of attainment through which children should progress. Four 'key stages' have been identified at which most children should be expected to have attained particular levels of attainment. In the primary school age-range there are two key stages. At Key Stage 1, the children (age seven) should be performing at levels of attainment 1-3 and at Key Stage 2 (age eleven), at levels 2-5. Then there are 'programmes of study' built on a series of statements of attainment for each of the levels in the attainment targets. For example in the case of science there are 16 attainment targets consisting of 157 statements of attainment. Assessment will be undertaken at the end of each key stage

through Standard Assessment Tasks. Ways of assessing children at age seven were piloted in the Summer of 1990 in a small number of schools to examine the feasibility of proposed assessment procedures. At the time the interview data reported in this paper ~~was~~ were collected there were already reports of the pilot schools experiencing much teacher and child stress. As one teacher expressed it, "The assessment, that's the other thing really. Teachers are worried about it. I know we do it anyway but it's the standard tests looming in the background somewhere and I'm not looking forward to doing that at all. Some of the pilot schools have said they're a work of art."

In trying to make sense of the assessment procedures of the National Curriculum whole school staffs were going to considerable lengths to understand what was likely to be required of individual teachers. Some ingenious possiblities were being explored to enable one staff to understand just what was meant by the levels of attainment described in the official documents. "All the schools in this area are looking at samples of children's work in English and we're seeing if we can agree on what might be early level one, middle level one and late level one work. We got some work from the reception class that we agreed was early level one. I thought James's work was early level one but then when I saw what Sophie had in her class you could see that there was a stage before that. So James fit into middle level one. And there was so much that was late level one that was definitely not level two. So we thought we had better divide each level into three to make it easier." The problem these teachers were becoming saddled with in this noble enterprise of clarification was that of agreeing on a nine level progression instead of a three level one. It would be easy to imagine what would happen if such a procedure were adopted to clarify teachers' understanding of each of the levels of attainment in the other

eight subjects across all the attainment targets at the first three levels. Then teachers were also being expected to aggregate results of assessment across the different subjects. "Some of the children are so varied though. In some things they might be level two yet they're level one in others and there's quite an imbalance."

One of the main problems following from the need teachers were feeling to gain some common understanding of the different levels of attainment was that the process of coming to agreement was extremely time consuming. One teacher tells of the way the demands on her time are increasing, eroding her ability to manage the classroom learning environment as she likes to, "and I think I'm not in my classroom enough after school, I'm dashing away to do something else and my displays have been up for about a month and I haven't time to change them when I should, so they start to peel or get dirty and I'm uneasy with the classroom because I want to change things and don't have time. There's always some extra demand." Another teacher tells a similar story, "Time! That's what we're finding the worst thing, trying to plan what we're doing. The time to sort out what we're supposed to be doing. The time to evaluate what we are doing and then to plan the next lot as well as all your normal preparation time. That the worst thing, there just isn't enough time." The teachers expressed concern for the threat posed by this lack of time to the quality of life in the classrooms for which they were responsible.

The problems created by time pressure may also give rise to a kind of seige mentality among teachers. Sallis warns against this and its impact on the public at a time when teachers most need to maintain good and open relations with those outside the field, "Schools must work to share their thinking with governors and parents, not feel they have to be a step ahead because they are professionals. In a situation where change comes so fast

and all the service has indigestion, a huge obstacle to progress is the professionals' feeling that they must possess understanding themselves before they can share, keep a step ahead, have the answer book." What she fears, at worst, is that the teachers may "retreat into even more territorial habits, as power to the parents and governors gets all mixed up in peoples' minds with the fear of the market place philosophy and all the destructive things it could do to schools."

In the cases of the teachers and schools I visited, I was seeing evidence that the teachers were accommodating successfully in many ways to the new demands on their time and energy. However, the quality of life for both teachers and children seemed to be threatened, leading to stress and to feelings of apprehension. The kind of teaching through close observation that Armstrong (1980) refers to and which these teachers would recognise as being similar to their practice requires time and professional self-confidence in the teacher, "Teaching which recognises children's efforts in making meaning of experience through engaging them with rich materials and actively using their thoughts as starting points for further learning. Close observation provides the data about the children's experience which subsequently shape the teacher's role." Scheirer's (1990) description of the teacher's role further underscores the need for the teacher to be sensitive to individual children, " the teacher acts as a bridge between the children and knowledge; the teacher both interprets knowledge for the child in order to facilitate learning and helps the child make personal meaning of the knowledge confronted." Ayers (1986) too, emphasizes recent views on the nature of learning which the 'collectivist' National Curriculum approach may be threatening, "Knowledge acquisition is active and involves children in construction and reconstruction, with the teacher as an 'interactor' who activates others in their engagement with

'object matter'." (p 50).

The professional demands on teachers

The third theme explored in discussion with teachers was that of the nature of the professional demands being made on them outside the classroom teaching environment. Some of the kinds of activity the teachers have been engaged in have already been referred to. There have been many meetings with other teachers to plan, implement and evaluate curriculum innovations. There have been in-service courses attended by teachers to increase their understanding of the implications of the National Curriculum for their teaching. Many have been involved in teaching their peers on such courses. There is a massive attempt to share the subject expertise that already resides in one school or one geographical area. Where procedural guidelines are unclear or nonexistent teachers have spent enormous amounts of time discussing the feasibility of many alternatives.

One teacher describes the demand, "There just seem to be more and more meetings for various reasons and more you've got to plan for too! For instance I'm going to a meeting on Saturday on Art because I want to go. So fine, if that's the only one I had that week, but I've got something on Thursday to go to and I've got to find out some things for it. Then by the time you get back from a meeting after school then you have a meal then you've got to start your preparation for teaching next day, soon the whole evening's gone!"

Another demand is for each teacher to take on special responsibility for different subjects of the curriculum or resources for learning. One of the teachers I talked with was responsible for the school's policy on children with special educational needs, using the computer in the classroom, history, physical education and swimming. Another was responsible for liaison with parents, with the local preschool, drama, art, music, and

deputizing for the headteacher when she was out of the school which was happening with increasing frequency. "I get so worried with having to assume all this authority. I guess it's just the thought - if things go wrong, it's all going to be my fault." Yet in each case these teachers were not considering doing anything else but teaching. One had been offered a job by a brother (company car, high salary, other additional perks) but she seemed more determined than she had in previous years to stay in teaching. "If I left it might be fine for me but what about these children? I feel I understand these children. I can't just turn away and say 'Oh, let someone else teach them!'." Another teacher said, "but I can't imagine myself doing anything else but teaching the children. When I'm in the class, enjoy my job and it's lovely to see the children making progress. It's just when you get to weekends and then you sort of think 'oh dear!'." A third teacher I asked if she had considered leaving the profession, put it this way, "No, not at the moment really. I'll wait and see when all this is settled. If we are called upon to publish the results and do all sorts of ridiculous things like that, I'd think about it. But I like being with the children because it's so interesting, it's so different every day." Some of the teachers remaining in teaching seem to be resolute and determined to do the very best they can for the children, their schools and for the profession. "Teachers may find it hard to achieve the idealized aims to which they aspire, but they show considerable determination and creativity in attempting to reconcile such ideals with the practical realities within which they must work." (Pollard, 1990, p 71)

Conclusion

Times are changing in England and the educational scene reflects the political reforms which have been initiated and successfully pursued by the

Conservative government under the strong leadership of Margaret Thatcher. It appears both from reading the work of educational commentators and from talking with teachers and headteachers that the reforms are having a considerable impact on school life. However, it is interesting to make the links between the critical writing of educators and the views of professionals who work in schools with children on a day-to-day basis.

Those who are in a position to publish critical accounts of the implications of government reforms are doing so with considerable fluency and assertiveness. Excellent critical writing is being made available to readers at great speed following events which are imposing change in a very short time frame. Such critical commentary is most valuable at times of rapid professional adaptation since teachers are accountable for the results of their work irrespective of the circumstances they are required to teach in. The teaching profession is working under duress at the present time not only because of the rate of change but also because the change is seen by many teachers to threaten professional standards. Yet the teachers are not in a position to assert their professionalism against the current government position.

Among the teachers I talked with, however, there is strong determination to continue to teach by means of strategies which best support children's learning even when such strategies are seen to be undermined by central government directives. Meanwhile, internationally there seems to be greater recognition than ever that the practical knowledge that teachers use in their work is highly complex and constructed on the basis of personal experience with children in classrooms (Elbaz,1983, Clandinin, 1986, Calderhead 1988 and Smyth 1987). Such a view of professional expertise indicates the value of empowering teachers to develop the curriculum in their own classrooms rather than designing standard curriculum materials to

circumvent the potentially negative effects of individual differences among teachers. There appear generally to be grounds for some optimistism about reform in primary education in Britain since rapid change can bring opportunities for teachers to rethink their priorities. As Pollard puts it, "ways in which the legislation will be interpreted and enacted will depend on professional judgement, on aims and values at the point of delivery." However, he goes on to say that "this can only be influential if teachers have the self-confidence and sense of perspective to use their remaining autonomy and responsibility. Power can be created and enacted by individuals. There are many responsibilities which remain, squarely, with the teaching profession." (In Proctor, 1990, p75).

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